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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for advancing student writing skills through the use of systematic and creative phonics instruction. The targeted population consisted of first and fourth grade students in a middle class suburban community located in the suburbs of Chicago. The problems of poor phonics skills and writing abilities were documented through data, which revealed a lack of knowledge and application of phonics strategies as demonstrated through the students' writing. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students show a lack of skills related to phonics and writing. Various professionals have also ascertained the existence of this problem through the documentation of their research and records. A review of the solution strategies suggested by other professionals in the field of elementary language arts resulted in a wide variety of intervention strategies that will be applied to the targeted population. Interventions included strategic and creative phonics instruction and support of the students' writing through writer's workshops, modeling of the writing process and allowing adequate time for the children to engage in meaningful writing experiences. Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of phonics skills, an improvement in the targeted spelling skills, and improved student writing abilities at all grade levels. Appended materials include: (1) First Grade Writing Survey; (2) Developmental Spelling Test; (3) Ninety Commonly Misspelled Words for Upper-grade Word Walls; (4) Writing Survey; (5) Written Language Inventory--Emergent and Early Writer (Creative Teaching Press, Inc., 1993); and (6) Written Langauge Inventory--Fluent Writer (Creative Teaching Press, Inc., 1993). (Contains 35 references, 4 tables, and 4 figures.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF PHONICS

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Field-Based Masters Program

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SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

Advisor

Advisor

Dean, School of Education

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted first and fourth grade classes exhibited a deficiency in phonetic skills, which interfered with quality writing growth. Evidence for the existence of this problem included assessment of the students' abilities as recorded on developmental spelling tests, writing surveys, a writing inventory and teacher observations.

Immediate Problem Context

Site A and Site B District

The district where Site A and Site B is located is in a northwestern suburb of a major Midwestern city. The district is the second largest district in the state and services seven communities. It is a unit district composed of 4 high schools, 7 middle schools and 38 elementary schools. At the time of this study, the average teaching experience was 14.3 years, 52.4% of these teachers held bachelor's degrees and 47.5% held master's degrees or above. The ethnic breakdown of the full-time faculty was as follows: 87.8% White, 9.0% Hispanic, 2.4% Black, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.1% Native

American. The faculty was 77.7% female and 22.3% was male. The district's total enrollment was 34,983 with $4,344 spent per pupil annually (School Report Card, 2000).

Site C District

Site C is located in a far-western suburb of a major Midwestern city. The district is a consolidated district, which serves only the city and unincorporated areas that surround it. The district is composed of one high school, one middle school and four elementary schools. At the time of this study, the average teaching experience was 12.8 years; 41.2% of those teachers held bachelor's degrees while 58.8% held master's degrees or above. The ethnic breakdown of the full time faculty was as follows: 99.6% White and 0.4% Black. The faculty was 78.5% female and 24.4% male. The average teacher salary was $49,172. The average administrator salary was $79,291. The district's total enrollment was 4,541 pupils with $3,856 spent per pupil annually (School Report Card, 2000).

Site A and Site B School

Site A and Site B school was established in August 1996, and at the time of this study enrolled 658 children from one community. The school is a two-story building with 6 mobile classrooms set in a residential area with three-park district owned baseball fields in the rear and a small amount of playground equipment. Site A and Site B school population included an ethnic background as follows: 79.2% White, 10.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.7 Hispanic, 3.1% Black and 0.3% Native American. The population included 6.3% of students from low-income households and 4.2% of students who were Limited-English-Proficient. Free lunches were made available to students who qualified. Of the

student population, 96.8% attended school regularly with a mobility rate of 8.8%. Site A and Site B school contained 29 classrooms which included 6 mobile classrooms, kindergarten through sixth grade. Each classroom had one teacher with an average of 25 children per class (School Report Card, 2000).

The mission statement of Site A and Site B school is to "create a child-centered community which provides a safe, caring environment, focusing on the education of the whole child, committed to empowering children to become good citizens and life long learners" (School Mission Statement, 1996). To carry out this intent, the school employed 29 regular classroom teachers, an all school reading support person, a speech and language therapist, a social worker, a psychologist, a school nurse, a cooperative interventionist who assisted the classroom teacher with interventions for inclusion students, a teacher for each special including art, music, library/computer lab, band, orchestra, physical education, and two full-time and one part-time learning resource consultant. In addition to the extensive staff, the elementary school offered a one semester gifted program for grades one through three and alternative gifted programs for grades four through six at a cooperating school in the district. Site A and Site B school offered gifted education beginning in grades four and five for those students who wished to remain at their home school. Extracurricular programs included a 5-week program called After-School Academy that offered a range of activities from sports to dance, Homework Club, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Battle of the Books and Honors Choir.

Site A was one of four regular first grade rooms at the school. School began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 2:30 p.m. with a 45-minute lunch break from 11:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. The curriculum included weekly averages of 775 minutes of language arts, 300 minutes of math, 300 minutes of either science or social studies, 125 minutes of special classes and 60 minutes of supervised physical activity. This classroom had an IBM compatible computer with Internet access and a variety of educational software. The room computer was linked with all the other school computers as well as the 27 computers in the lab. There was also a mounted television and VCR with cable access.

Site B was one of four regular education fourth grade rooms at the school. School began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 2:30 p.m. with a 45-minute lunch break from 12:05 p.m. to 12:50 p.m. The curriculum included weekly averages of 600 minutes of language arts, 250 minutes each of math, science, and social studies, 125 minutes of specials and 75 minutes of supervised physical activity. This classroom had two IBM compatible computers with Internet access and variety of educational software. The room computers were linked with all the other school computers as well as the 27 computers in the lab. There was also a mounted television and VCR with cable access.

Site C School

Site C school was established in August 1996 and at the time of this study enrolled 557 students from the community in the 1999-2000 school year. The school is a two-story building with a large amount of open space, two playground areas and a baseball field surrounding it. The school was part of a master-planned community. Site C school population included the following ethnic background: 97.0% White, 0.2% Black,

0.6% Hispanic and 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander. The population counted no students from low-income households and 0.2% of students who were Limited-English-Proficient. Of the student population, 96.4% attended school regularly with a 10.2% mobility rate. Site C school contained 24 classrooms, kindergarten through sixth grade, which included an art and a music room. Each classroom had one teacher with an average of 24 students per class (School Report Card 2000).

The mission statement of Site C school is "The staff believes that public education is the responsibility of the school, home and community. We are committed to providing a safe environment that encourages children and adults to: develop physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually, give their best effort to become independent, cooperative and continuous learners, become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers and exhibit appropriate and ethical conduct." To carry out this intent, the school employed 23 regular classroom teachers, a reading support person, a speech and language therapist, a social worker, a psychologist, a school nurse, a teacher for each special including art, music, library, band, orchestra, physical education and two full-time learning resource consultants. Site C school also offered an accelerated and enriched program from students in third through fifth grade. Extracurricular programs included a 4-week program called After School Enrichment that offered a wide range of activities from drama to animal studies. There were also Brownie and Cub Scout programs.

Site C was one of four regular education first grade classrooms at the school. School began at 8:15 a.m. and ended at 2:30 p.m. with a 45 minute lunch break from 11:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The curriculum included weekly averages of 600 minutes of

language arts, 250 minutes each of science, math and social studies, 220 minutes of specials and 175 minutes of supervised physical activity. This classroom had one IBM compatible computer with Internet access and a variety of educational software. The room computers were linked with five computers in a grade level teaming area, all the other classroom computers and the 30 computers in the lab. There was also a mounted television and VCR.

Site A and Site B Community

The surrounding community of Site A and Site B had a population of 40,438 people. The ethnic breakdown of the community was as follows: 80.15% White, 12.01% Asian/Pacific Islander, 10.03% Hispanic, 4.70% Black, 0.48% American Indian, and 4.79% Other. The median home cost was $126,900 with the median household income being $45,141. Sixty-five percent of the homes were owner occupied. The east side of the community was primarily industrial corporations while the west side was mostly residential (School Report Card, 2000).

Site C Community

In the year 2000, the surrounding community of Site C had a population of 12,617 people. The ethnic breakdown of the community was as follows: 98.35% White, 0.10% Black, 1.4% Hispanic, 0.10% American Indian, 1.16% Asian/Pacific Islander and .29% of other races. The median home cost was $148,900 with the median household income being $49,755. Owners occupied 81.6% of the homes. The community was primarily residential with commercial establishments throughout the area (School Report Card, 2000).

National Context of the Problem

"Standardized test results confirm the majority of children in public schools in America are not learning the English language skills they need to function successfully in society" (DeMoulin, Loye, Swan, Block and Schnabel, 1999, p. 40). The big debate about how to properly teach reading and writing to elementary school children always revolves around the use of phonics and whole language. Much research exists to support either method, but it is becoming more and more apparent that phonics is a necessary part of learning to read and write. According to Regie Routman, a leading language arts expert, "Phonics is like sex. Everyone is doing it, but no one is talking about it" (as cited in Stahl, Stahl, Duffy-Hester, 1998, p. 338). Time and time again it has been found that students have an increased ability to read and write when a phonics program has been used. Eldredge and Lloyd completed a study that placed 23 first graders into a classroom where only whole language (holistic) was taught. Twenty-six first graders from the same Rocky Mountain region school district were placed into a classroom where phonics and whole language were taught (structured). The children in the structured classroom produced better quality writing samples than those children taught in a primarily holistic manner. Within the group of children receiving phonics instruction the children wrote, on average, 72 total words compared to 49 words, on average, written by the children in the whole language classroom. The children also used more correctly spelled words.

In 1989 California introduced a whole language method of teaching children to read and write. Children were being given books to read, but no tools were taught to help them decode the words. Using these tactics, first grade scores slipped by 7% that

year and continued to fall. Because of these findings, and others like them, Nebraska, California and Virginia have all seen the importance of using phonics to teach reading and writing to elementary school students (Hancock and Wingert, 1996).

Children have ideas and words for writing. What they need is to know how to record those ideas and words onto paper. Phonics is a tool that a writer uses. Phonics should be taught so that children learn to spell. According to the McCrackens (1995) "...30 to 40 percent of children do not seem to understand how written language functions until they work physically with it." Children must have repeated teaching, exposure and practice to learn the alphabetic principle of spelling through phonics. "Until children learn how to spell, it is likely that they will always be poor spellers as they try to memorize letter sequences to learn words" (McCracken, 1995, p.114).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Focusing on phonics in the writing process is a topic that is slowly being explored by experts across the country. As investigations deepen, we are becoming more aware of the fact that elementary school children are lacking in their ability to use phonics in the writing process. In order to document this problem, a student writing survey, writing samples and student writing journals analyzed through the completion of the Written Language Inventory, results of weekly spelling tests, and in the targeted first grade classrooms, the use of the Gentry Developmental Spelling Test.

In September, 49 first grade students from Sites A and C participated in the First Grade Writing Survey (Appendix A). Each of the students was interviewed on their feelings about writing. The students were interviewed as a whole group, but individually responded to the questionnaire. The survey consisted of eight questions. They all required an answer of Great, Good, Not So Good, and Terrible. The responses to the eight survey questions appear in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1

Site A responses to First Grade Writing Survey

	Great	Good	Not So Good	Terrible
How do you feel when you write at home?	74%	22%	0%	4%
How do you feel when you write at school?	65%	27%	4%	4%
How do you feel when writing instead of playing?	35%	13%	17%	35%
How do you feel about writing with a friend?	70%	17%	9%	4%
How do you feel about writing on plain paper?	74%	17%	0%	9%
How do you feel about writing on colored paper?	57%	17%	4%	22%
How do you feel about writing on lined paper?	57%	13%	8%	22%
How do you feel when you have to stretch out a word so you can write it?	48%	22%	13%	17%

Table 1 shows that the majority of students at Site A generally feel great about writing. Of the 23 students surveyed, 74% answered great when asked how they feel about writing at home. Twenty-two percent answered good and 4% answered terrible. However, when asked how they felt about writing at school, 65% responded great, 27% felt good and 4% felt not so good and 4% responded terrible. Only 35% of the students felt great about writing instead of playing, 13% felt good, 17% felt not so good and 39% felt terrible. When asked how they felt about writing with a friend, 70% of the students thought it would be great, 17% thought it felt good, 9% responded not so good and 4% felt terrible.

The next three questions pertained to the type of paper they would use. Seventy-four percent responded that it would be great to use white paper, 17% responded good and 9% responded terrible. When asked how they felt about writing on colored paper, 57% answered great, 17% responded good, 4% answered not so good and 22% responded terrible. Students reported similar feelings about writing on lined paper. Fifty-seven percent felt great, 13% felt good, 9% felt not so good and 22% felt terrible.

The last question asked how the children felt about stretching out a word to write it. Forty-eight percent responded great, 22% responded good, 13% felt not so good and 17% responded terrible.

Table 2

Site C responses to First Grade Writing Survey

	Great	Good	Not So Good	Terrible
How do you feel when you write at home?	42%	42%	8%	8%
How do you feel when you write at school?	42%	42%	8%	8%
How do you feel when writing instead of playing?	23%	19%	4%	54%
How do you feel about writing with a friend?	77%	23%	0%	0%
How do you feel about writing on plain paper?	46%	23%	12%	19%
How do you feel about writing on colored paper?	38%	38%	8%	15%
How do you feel about writing on lined paper?	38%	15%	19%	27%
How do you feel when you have to stretch out a word so you can write it?	23%	31%	15%	31%

Table 2 also shows that the majority of students at Site C generally feel great about writing. Of the 26 students surveyed, 42% answered great when asked how they feel about writing at home and school, 42% percent answered good, 8 % responded not so good and 8% answered terrible. Only 23% of the students felt great about writing instead of playing, 19% felt good, 4% felt not so good and 54% felt terrible. When asked how they felt about writing with a friend, 77% of the students thought it would be great and 23% thought it felt good.

The next three questions pertained to the type of paper they would use. Forty-six percent responded that it would be great to use white paper, 23% responded good and 12% responded not so good and 19% responded terrible. When asked how they felt about writing on colored paper, 38% answered great, 38% responded good, 8% answered not so good and 15% responded terrible. Students reported similar feelings about writing on lined paper. Thirty-eight percent felt great, 15% felt good, 19% felt not so good and 27% felt terrible.

The last question asked how the children felt about stretching out a word to write it. Twenty-three percent responded great, 31% responded good, 15% felt not so good and 31% responded terrible.

Site A and Site C

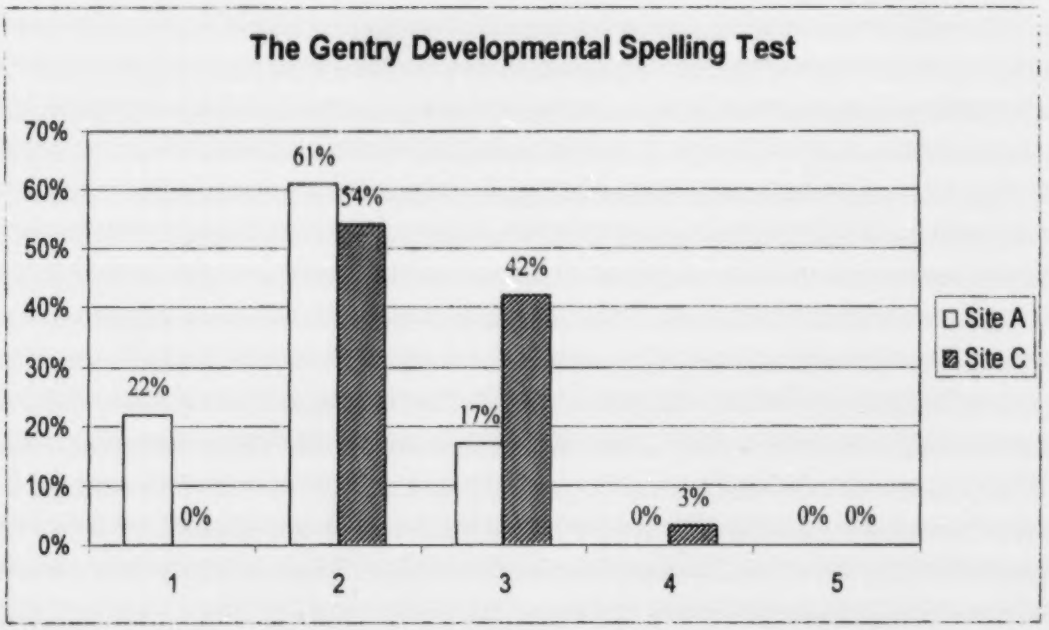

Figure 1. Site A and Site C Gentry Developmental Spelling Test, September 2001

Students were given the Gentry Developmental Spelling Test (Appendix B) in September, 2001. The test was administered to the whole group and each child wrote down a spelling response to each of the ten words. Of the students at Site A, 22% were at a precommunicative spelling stage, 61% were at a semiphonetic stage, 17% were at a phonetic stage and 0% were at a transitional stage. Of the students at Site C, 0% were at a precommunicative spelling stage, 54% were a semiphonetic stage, 42% were at a phonetic stage and 3% were at a transitional stage. There were no students spelling conventionally in the fall. This test reflected the fact that students at Site A are primarily at a semiphonetic stage, where as the majority of the students at Site C were split between the semiphonetic and phonetic stage.

The precommunicative stage is defined as using random letters to spell with no letter sound correspondence. Semiphonetic is an abbreviated phonetic spelling which uses one to three letters to spell the word. Phonetic spelling is defined as the spelling of words by ear. Transitional spelling is spelling by eye; it looks like English spelling. The final stage of spelling according to Gentry is conventional (proper spelling) and no students at Site A or B achieved this level (Gentry, 2000).

Site B

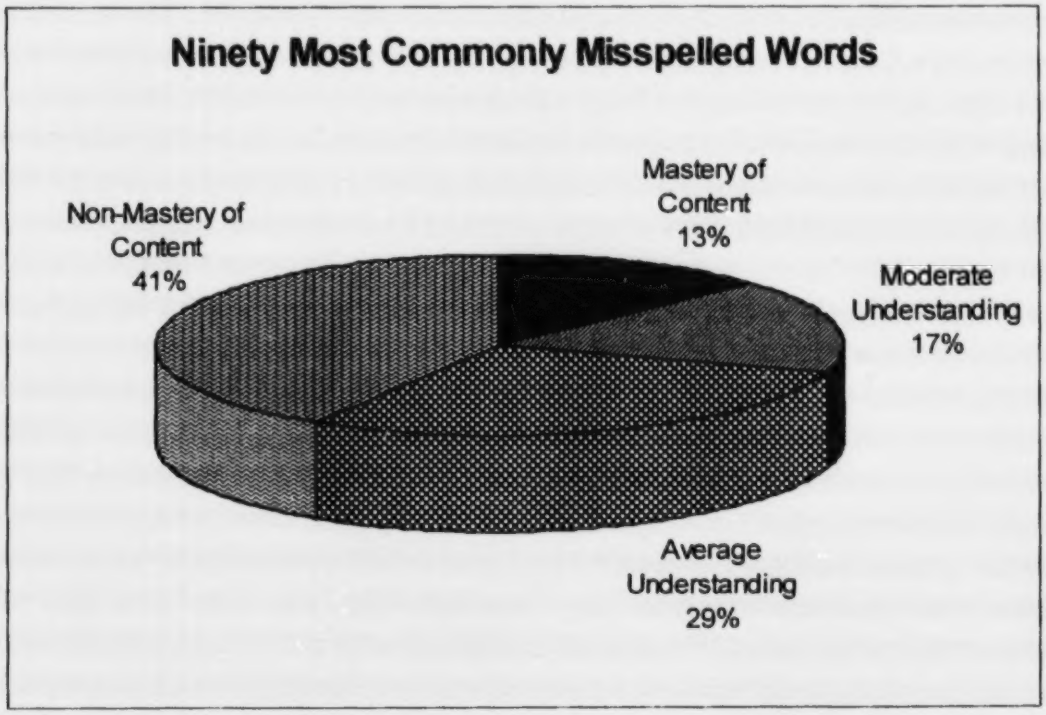

Figure 2. Site B most commonly misspelled words tested list, September 2001

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In September, 22 students participated in this study. Students were tested on their ability to spell the Ninety Most Commonly Misspelled Words (Appendix C). Of the students at Site B 13% have mastery of the content or 90-100% accuracy, 17% have a moderate understanding or 80-89% accuracy, 29% have an average understanding and 41% have not mastered the content. Non-mastery of the content is represented by less than 69% accuracy.

The students in Site B classroom responded to a Writing Survey (Appendix D). The survey consisted of six questions and only one of those questions required yes or no answers. In response to the question asking if the students believed they were writers, 18 of the 22 students responded positively and four responded negatively.

The other questions asked related to learning how to write, why people write, what makes a good writer and how students feel about their writing. Students responded that they and other people learn how to write at school and at home from their parents. The students felt that people write to be able to get a good job, communicate with others, to give and receive information, and it is an important part of life. When asked what a writer does in order to write well, all students responded that practice, good spelling, and taking their time was the key to good writing. Most students felt good about their writing. Their responses included they love to write, it is great or just pretty good, it could be better with practice, and spelling is not very good, but is improving. Some students interpreted this question as pertaining to handwriting. Their responses included they liked their writing because it is neat, and their writing is not that good so they normally type, and their handwriting could be neater.

Sites A, B and C

All of the students involved in the study had their writing observed using a Written Language Inventory (Appendix E). The children were evaluated in the following four areas: writing process, punctuation and capitalization, spelling and grammar.

The results of this survey indicated that of the children at Site A, 91% were beginning emergent and 9% were secure emergent. Batzle defines beginning emergent writers as writers who use pictures, scribbles and symbols to represent writing. Beginning emergent writers also realize that their symbols represent talk written down. Occasionally, these writers will use beginning and ending consonants. Secure emergent writers use left to right directional movement, approximate spelling and spaces between words. They also self-select topics and take risks with their writing (1992).

Of the children at Site B 82% were beginning fluent, 10% were secure early writers and 8% were secure fluent. Of the children at Site C, 77% were beginning early writers, 20% were secure emergent writers and 3% were secure early writers.

According to Batzle, beginning early writers use initial and final consonant sounds correctly as well as placing vowels in the appropriate places in words. They use approximate spelling, but are moving towards conventional spelling. They also use some high frequency words correctly. Secure early writers use high frequency words correctly, manipulate patterns in words, including the use of proper vowels in the appropriate places in words, and they begin to consult classroom resources to spell words correctly. Many secure emergent writers choose titles for their stories and use a simple beginning, middle and end when writing a story. Beginning fluent writers develop a beginning, middle and

end to a story and demonstrate knowledge about the subject. The majority use word endings correctly and attempt appropriate punctuation. In contrast, secure fluent writers use punctuation correctly, can develop a theme or topic with details and can write multiple paragraphs. Secure fluent writers also initiate editing and revision, as well as use proper verb tenses throughout their writing. At this level, the writer should also show concern for the quality of their work (1992).

Probable Causes

The targeted schools had experienced frustration in teaching writing skills to children who lacked a strong phonics background. It was believed that this was due to several factors. The first factor affecting the success of student writers was a lack of experience with language. "Children are always learning about language and learning about the world around them. A great deal of their language development and their learning occurs before children start school. Parents and caregivers play a vital role in the home and community experiences that begin this learning process" (McGowan, 1992, para.1). In order for children to be successful in written language, they must have a strong verbal language developed, which is often based in phonemic awareness.

Sadly, a second factor which places children at risk for being poor writers is a whole language curriculum. The lack of phonics in the classroom is one of the single biggest problems for elementary school children. "Our largest and trendiest state forced the facts of illiteracy into the national news stream. California came in last in national fourth grade reading tests, set up a state task force to find out why, held legislative hearings, discovered that the state's new Whole Language method is a disaster and

earmarked $100 million for new textbooks and teacher training to switch the schools back to phonics" (Schlafly, 1996, p. 2). What more evidence is necessary in the fight to teach phonics to children to help them develop strong reading and writing skills.

Unfortunately, there are some students who have little to no control over the problems that led them to have poor writing skills. Learning disabilities affect many children across the country. From prenatal substance abuse to reasons unknown to modern science, children suffer from disabilities beyond their control. Students who have learning disabilities may exhibit a wide range of traits, including problems with reading comprehension, spoken language, writing or reasoning ability (Fitzsimmons 1998). These traits often prohibit the children from being able to internalize the lessons taught by classroom teachers.

"Since writing is a blend of several distinct human capacities, it is worth considering how it can engage Gardener's seven intelligences" (Grow, 1995, para. 1) These intelligences are often not met by untrained classroom teachers. Ensuring that teachers allow children to be in contact with their personal strengths as learners and writers can help to tackle this problem.

The next factor is one that falls on many educators because of outside pressures. In an age where more is better, many teachers and a curriculum that supports them are pushing children to perform mastery of reading and writing tasks before they are developmentally ready to do so. "Although many kindergartners can recognize some letters, words and phrases, they may revert back to drawing or scribbling when

encouraged to write a story. Adults should accept this as a valuable attempt at writing and avoid prodding children to write only in words" (Maehr, 1991, para. 15).

Another factor that affected the success of the students was a lack of meaningful writing time. It is imperative that children be allowed classtime to develop work-in-progress. This valuable time allows children the opportunity to interact with other students and to develop a web of peer editing and critique. The key to this activity is the meaning of the time. Students must be asked to engage in writing skills that will carry over into real life. "When was the last time that you were asked to complete a fill-in-the-blank workbook page? How often do you sit down and copy the same word ten times? Unfortunately, many school children are asked to do these tasks daily in classrooms across the country….Our writing has meaning and children should also have meaningful writing opportunities" (Bieniek, 1996, para. 2).

Along those same lines comes the problem of there not being enough hours in the day. This was one of the greatest enemies. With more and more curricular demands piling up on teachers, it is hard to find time for creativity and quiet thinking. It is so important for classrooms to appear busy and productive that this aspect is often forgotten. "Three things determine the successful development of literacy: time, time and time…. Nothing is more important than how the children in your classroom spend their time" (Gentry, 2000, p. 22).

Children's struggles with writing, when expected to use phonetic strategies, are a result of many individual factors which have come together to put pressure on children, teachers and parents alike. Lack of opportunity to be involved in proper experiences, lack

of opportunity for meaningful writing, the use of Whole Language instruction, learning disabilities, improper teaching techniques to reach the intelligences of the children, lack of developmentally appropriate practice and poor use of time are all major influences that work against the teaching of phonics in writing in our classrooms everyday. All of these factors need to be addressed in order to help children to excel when applying phonetic skills to their writing each and every day.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Clearly, phonics plays a large part in a student's ability to read, write and spell. Although discussions of phonics often center on reading, an important finding of Dahl and Scharer's research was "the linkage between reading and writing in these classrooms and the contribution that the linkage with writing made to the children's understanding of letter-sound relationships" (Dahl, K.L., Schauer, P.L., 2000). Developing these skills is imperative to the student's success. "One reason why educators are so interested in phonemic awareness is that research indicates that it is the best predictor of the ease of early reading acquisition, better even than IQ, vocabulary and listening comprehension" (Sensenbaugh, 1996, para. 4). Such strong research findings support the belief that children must have a solid phonemic background before they can be successful readers and writers. "…Most teachers agree that children's acquisition of phonics skills is an essential part of their reading development. Teachers, by and large, also concur that 'children who start slowly in acquiring decoding skills rarely become strong readers.' There appears to be a widespread assent among teachers that 'early acquisition of

decoding skills leads to wider reading [by children] in and out of school" (Groff, 1998, p. 138).

One of the very first steps in learning to read and write should be the development of letter-sound relationships. This is something that children should be consciously aware of in order to be at their best when reading and writing (Burns, 1999). The acquisition of these skills is built upon several layers, which can be dissected when looking at whole-to-part phonics strategies. The building blocks of this strategy center around what children already know. As they continue to learn, this gives them the base to recognize familiar sounds in unfamiliar words. This decoding ability assists them in the mastery of a large vocabulary, which is both oral and written. "Whole-to-part phonics instruction starts with what emergent readers know and uses what they know to help them know more" (Moustafa, Maldonado, 1999, para. 15). Of course for children to be successful, they must first have phonemic awareness and have knowledge of letter-sound relationships (Eldredge and Baird, 1996).

Developmentally appropriate practice dictates that teachers should allow children to use inventive spelling techniques to further develop their phonemic awareness. "During the past decade language researchers have shed new light on the spelling process. The acquisition of spelling rules is now viewed as a complex developmental process. Once the stages of this process are identified, elementary teachers can help students develop strategies for learning standard English spelling, and they can assess students' progress more accurately" (Lutz, 1986, para. 1). Inventive spelling techniques lay an important groundwork for learning in the higher grades. According to Cunningham

this groundwork is especially important for learning new vocabulary and for works in progress (Cunningham, Hall and Sigmon, 1999). Giving children the opportunity to manipulate and mold the letters and sounds in their own way helps to develop confidence as well. "Children who are allowed and encouraged to 'spell it so you can read it,' write longer and better first drafts than children who only write words they know how to spell" (Cunningham, 1995, p. 91). Researchers have found that the use of inventive spelling removed inhibitions about ability and the fluency and quality of the work is greatly increased. "Each invented spelling is a permanent record of an individual's journey to spelling competence. If we collect these snapshots, these invented spellings, and analyze them; we can put together a remarkable album that shows milestones along the way. Since the journey unfolds developmentally in patterns that are predictable and systematic, we can chart the journey with precision and accuracy" (Gentry, 2000, p. 93).

In order to help children develop these skills, there are a variety of activities that can be implemented to make the classroom a productive and fun place to learn. Modeling proper writing procedures is one of the most important activities a teacher can use as a mean to the desired result. "Children should watch the teacher write. The teacher can talk about what she is doing and why she is doing it. This will help the children understand the process of writing" (Bieniek, 1996, para. 5). The easiest way to use this strategy is by asking the children for their help in your writing. Using chart paper opens the activity to the whole classroom. This visual allows children to offer help through "dictation of letters, word chunks, spaces and punctuation. The teacher then models and instructs encoding strategies such as segmenting, blending and finding familiar word patterns or

word parts" (Short, Kane and Peeling, 2000 p. 289). Leading children to become aware of the patterns in words is major step in the development of phonemic awareness. Research suggests that Dr. Seuss and nursery rhymes are essential for the acquisition of this skill. The teacher's role in this process is to point out the patterns so the children are eventually able to anticipate and even find the letters that make the rhymes on their own. According to Juel and Meier, this also helps to foster spelling-sound knowledge (Meier and Juel, 1999).

The third activity, which can be used in the acquisition of phonemic awareness, is word sorts. According to Cunningham, word sorts are an excellent activity. They help children acquire the ability to use patterns to identify words. Word work allows children the opportunity to explore the relationship between letters and words in a hands-on environment. The knowledge they obtain can then be used when children are expected to read, write and spell unfamiliar words (Bear and Templeton, 1998). "Making Words is a hands-on, manipulative activity in which students learn how adding letters and moving letters around creates new words" (Cunningham and Hall, 1998, p. 16). When children are given the chance to physically manipulate the letters and words which they are expect to know, it brings a whole new light to ways which they are able to internalize the information. "Activities that allow students to spell and manipulate words by sorting and changing them (sit to set to sat) are an essential part of the curriculum for beginning readers. Just allowing students to play with the structure of words will help many students to understand the alphabetic principle. Studies have shown that programs incorporating these elements (as well as reading to children, discussions and language

rich activities) are about twice as effective as the more indirect, unfocused methods of instruction now in wide use" (Honig, 1997, p. 20).

One of the final activities that can be implemented into any classroom, no matter what the age, is the Word Wall. "There are some words that you do not want students to have to decode while reading, or invent the spelling of while writing – the frequently occurring words in our language.... When children at an early age learn to recognize and automatically spell the most frequently occurring words, all of their attention is freed for decoding and spelling less frequent words and, more important, for processing meaning.... The second reason we do not want children to decode or invent spell these words are that many of the most frequent words are not pronounced or spelled in predictable ways" (Cunningham, 1995, p. 96).

In order to assess the transfer of this information in students' writing, an adequate amount of time in meaningful writing activities needs to be provided. Setting aside a specific period of time for writing communicates to children that it is a valued part of the day. Because writing is a necessary skill, it is very often evaluated. It is important to allow class time for the development of these works, which are to be evaluated, because of the valuable interactions that lead to peer review and editing. Allowing children the chance to work together teaches them the give-and-take, which helps to build a network of support within the classroom (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). The problem that many teachers face in developing this schedule is finding the time to make these activities happen. With so many other programs and such a large amount of curriculum, which must be taught, the hours of the school day can easily fly by. "Many teachers find it

difficult to decide how much time and effort should be allotted to first drafts and how much revising, editing and publishing. While the actual amounts may vary with the ability and age of the children, elementary children should usually spend more time writing their first drafts than they spend publishing them…the critical factor will be the time allocated for writing and how that time is organized" (Allington and Cunningham, 1994). Many teachers set up a writer's workshop to meet the needs of the writing assignments. This is a time and or place within the classroom that allows children to manipulate their writing and hone this tool to effective communication (Avery, 1993).

Once the time is found within a class schedule, the next step is to determine what the children should be writing about. If one thinks about their own personal choices for writing, most people will realize that they choose to write about that with which they are most familiar. According to Fountas and Pinnell there are vast opportunities available to students for learning about new and exciting things. It is important for teachers to realize that children need concrete experiences to write about before we can expect to assess them on what they know (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

Much of this research supports the fact that children must have a multitude of experiences that will open them to the world of reading and writing. Such phonemic experiences help children build the groundwork for future reading and writing skills. "The research is clear and substantial, and the evidence is unequivocal: Students who enter first grade with a wealth of phonological awareness are more successful readers than those who do not" (Fitzsimmons, 1998, para. 5).

OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS STATEMENTS

As a result of the use of systematic and creative phonics instruction during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the targeted first and fourth grade classes will improve phonemic awareness which will lead to increased writing capabilities, as measured by spelling tests, student writing journals and writing samples, teacher observations and the Written Language Inventory by Janine Batzle (Appendix E).

Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Create and teach lesson plans using systematic and creative phonics instruction, which will lead to improved writing skills for each grade level.
2. Collect and organize materials for each of the targeted grade levels, which will focus on phonemic awareness and writer's workshops.
3. Provide direct instruction and models of the expected writing process.
4. Provide students with adequate time to be involved in meaningful writing experiences.

ACTION PLAN

The action plan for the research project was designed to include the use of phonemic awareness and writing skills integrated into the targeted first and fourth grade classes. These units increased the writing capabilities and improved the attitude that students had toward writing. The intervention period was begun on September 10, 2001

and continued for 12 weeks until November 30, 2001. Each targeted grade level followed the general action plan outline listed below.

WEEK 1 (September 10 – 14)

A. Administer student writing surveys to targeted groups.

B. Elicit student writing samples from targeted groups.

C. The targeted first grade classes will complete letter and word recognition assessments.

D. The targeted fourth grade class will be tested over the 90 most frequently used writer's words.

E. The targeted fourth grade class will complete word recognition assessments.

WEEK 2 (September 17 - 21)

A. Begin modeling the writing process through mini-lessons presented each day.

B. Introduce student writing journals in the targeted first and fourth grade classes.

C. Begin Making Words lessons.

D. Begin to observe student writing progress.

WEEK 3 (September 24 - 28)

A. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will begin spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

B. Model the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process.

C. Making Words lessons will continue.

D. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

E. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 4 (October 1 - 5)

A. Begin modeling the skills used in the writer's workshop literacy center.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 5 (October 8 - 12)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Introduction rhyming poetry to support phonics lessons.

G. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 6 (October 15 - 19)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Continuation of rhyming poetry to support phonics lessons.

G. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 7 (October 22 - 26)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 8 (October 29 – November 2)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 9 (November 5 – 9)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 10 (November 12 – 16)

A. The children in the targeted classrooms will be allowed to use the writer's workshop during center time.

B. The targeted first and fourth grade classes will continue spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which support phonics strategies.

C. Modeling of the writing process through mini-lessons to model the writing process will continue.

D. Making Words lessons will continue.

E. Support of student writing in their journals will continue.

F. Observation of student writing progress will continue.

WEEK 11 (November 19 – 21)

A. Administration of student writing surveys to targeted groups.

B. The targeted first grade classes will begin letter and word recognition assessments.

C. The targeted fourth grade class will begin to be tested over the 100 most frequently used writer's words.

D. The targeted fourth grade class will begin word recognition assessments.

WEEK 12 (November 26 – 30)

A. Elicit student writing samples from targeted groups and analyze them for progress.

B. The targeted first grade classes will complete letter and word recognition assessments.

C. The targeted fourth grade class will complete testing of the 100 most frequently used writer's words.

D. The targeted fourth grade class will complete word recognition assessments.

METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

There are five major methods of assessment that were used to measure the effects of the proposed Action Plan. These methods included a student writing survey, writing samples and student writing journals which were analyzed through the completion of the Written Language Inventory, results of the letter and word recognition assessment, results of weekly spelling tests and, in the targeted first grade classroom, the use of the Gentry Developmental Spelling Test.

The children's feelings about writing were determined and discussed through the completion of the student writing survey. The analysis of the writing samples and student writing journals were used to monitor the growth of the students' writing. They also helped us determine the strengths and needs of the students through the use of the Written Language Inventory. This inventory was also used to determine the developmental stage of writing the student had achieved. The letter and word recognition assessments were utilized in order to determine the children's level of phonemic awareness. The weekly spelling tests were used to determine the level of weekly growth the children have achieved in order to aid their writing skills. The Gentry Developmental Spelling Test is an easy way to assess the stage of spelling development and is directly connected to the child's inventive spelling abilities.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to include the use of phonemic awareness and writing skills integrated into the targeted first and fourth grade classes in order to increase the children's ability to become better writers. As a result of implementing the chosen interventions, the teacher researchers were seeking evidence of improved phonemic awareness which would lead to increased writing capabilities. These improvements were measured by different assessment tools depending on the grade level of the targeted students. The strategies began in September 2001. A summary of 12 weeks of intervention follows.

Site A and Site C

The first week in September 2001, the teacher researchers in Site A and Site C gathered data to determine baseline data of each child's capacities and feelings about writing. This was accomplished through the administration of the Gentry Developmental Spelling Test and the writing survey. Teacher researchers elicited a writing sample from each child in order to assess their writing capabilities using the Written Language Survey.

Once baseline data were recorded, the teacher researchers began to introduce the intervention.

Throughout the entire intervention children worked daily in their writing journals. Their journal writing time was a time for free writing, but the children were also expected to make use of the writing strategies that had been presented in daily writing lessons. Throughout the interventions the teacher researchers were constantly observing student writing and offering strategies for implementation of skills which were presented in the mini-lessons.

Beginning in the second week of the intervention the teacher researchers began to implement daily lessons in writing strategies. The early lessons focused on directionality, realizing that words are talk written down and stretching words in order to sound them out. An early goal was for the children to express beginning and ending sounds of the words they were attempting to write. As the weeks progressed, the lessons started to focus on basic punctuation, capitalization, spaces between words and correct spelling of common sight words. Towards the final weeks of intervention the lessons were centered on the idea of writing multiple sentences with a single topic of interest.

Week 2 also brought the implementation of Making Words lessons. These lessons concentrated on beginning and ending sounds in the initial stages of the intervention. As the lessons progressed, the teacher researchers presented lessons on chunking and word families. Toward the end of the intervention the teacher researchers were teaching lessons about short vowel sounds.

Week 3 had the children focusing on spelling lessons and weekly assessments, which supported the phonics strategies that were presented. Spelling lessons challenged the children with a list of 100 words from Cunningham's Month by Month Phonics for First Grade. Five words were chosen each week. The chosen words supported the journal writing the students were expected to do each day. Each week the children were assessed on their ability to spell the words correctly and from that point forward the teacher researchers looked to see that the words were spelled correctly in the children's journal writing.

Week 4 brought the introduction of the Writer's Workshop. This was a part of the intervention that did not run as smoothly as expected for the teacher researchers. This was due to the fact that the amount of daily maintenance required for such an elaborate workshop became overwhelming for the amount of time available to the teacher researchers for one activity. The work produced by the children was not of a high quality because of the lack of supervision available. It was difficult to use workshop in the manner intended because the teacher researchers used the workshop as a center the children were involved in while the teacher researchers were teaching reading. In retrospect, the teacher researchers would spend more time modeling the workshop as a whole group and engaging the children in workshop activities as a whole class. Trained parent volunteers would also be used to prepare supplies and oversee the work of the students.

Rhyming poetry was introduced during week 5. The objective of the poetry was to support the weekly phonics lessons. The poems that were presented were thematic

and included many of the sight words and phonetic combinations that the children were learning about in more traditional lessons. These poems also supported the Making Words and spelling lessons.

During the next 4 weeks of the intervention the teacher researchers continued to present the aforementioned elements of the action plan. The activities were often repetitive in order to form a strong phonetic foundation in each child's repertoire. In the final two weeks of the intervention the teacher researchers re-administrated and completed the assessment tools used at the onset of the action plan.

Site B

During the first week in September 2001, the teacher researcher in Site B gathered information to determine baseline data of each child's capacities and feelings about writing. This was accomplished through a writing sample which was assessed by the Written Language Inventory, a writing survey and a testing of the Ninety Most Commonly Misspelled Words. Once baseline data were recorded the teacher researcher began to introduce the intervention.

Beginning in the second week and continuing throughout the intervention, the teacher researcher began modeling the writing process. Mini lessons focused on the basics of sentence writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling. This early objective was to refresh the students' memories of writing proper sentences and move them into more complicated and well thought out paragraphs. As the weeks progressed, the lessons became more involved with the students becoming the facilitators of the writing process. Toward the final weeks the lessons were centered on writing stories, and expository,

persuasive and narrative papers with multiple paragraphs. The students were also to pay special attention to the editing part of the writing process specifically grammar, proper punctuation and correct spelling. Observations of student writing were performed throughout the entire intervention period by the teacher researcher.

The action plan was designed for Making Words lessons to begin during the second week of intervention. However, due to time constraints, they did not begin until week three. The students' writing journals were also postponed until week four because of the lack of time for proper instruction.

During week 3 the teacher researcher began implementation of the Making Words lessons. Making Words is usually thought of as a primary grade activity, however, when used in the upper grades it helps to solidify the concepts of letter-sound relationships. It also assists students who have had difficulties in spelling to have the opportunity to use this skill again helping them develop their phonemic awareness that may have been completely developed in the primary grades. The Making Words lessons concentrated on initial sounds, patterns, rhyming and prefix and suffixes. The students sort the words and transfer these patterns into other words and learn to spell and write new words.

Week 3 also brought the implementation of weekly spelling lessons and subsequent weekly assessments which supported phonics strategies. The weekly lessons presented generalizations designed to assist students when making connections in spelling patterns or relationships between words. The lessons consisted of the teacher researcher giving the students a weekly pretest of 15 selected words. The students who

correctly spelled two or fewer words wrong were exempt from taking the posttest at the end of the week. These students were to study the words from the selected Challenge Word List. Those students who incorrectly spelled more than two of the spelling list words were instructed to study these words for the posttest at the end of the school week. These students were also invited to study the words on the Challenge Word List and take that portion of the test in addition to the weekly spelling words. Each week the students were assessed on their ability to spell the words correctly and from that point forward the teacher researcher looked to see that the words were spelled correctly in their writing assignments and journals.

The introduction of student writing journals began during week 4 of the intervention process. Their writing journals were a time to respond to what they were reading during SSR (Self Selected Reading). This journal writing was a time for free writing, but the students were also expected to remember and apply the writing and spelling strategies taught each week. Throughout the intervention the teacher researcher collected the journals and assessed the students weekly on their writing. The teacher researcher offered comments and made notations where writing inconsistencies and spelling mistakes were found. The students were instructed to read the comments and conference with the teacher researcher to discuss any questions or concerns. The students were also instructed to make corrections to any notated spelling mistakes.

Week 5 brought the implementation of the Writer's Workshop. It was intended that this would be used during center time. However, circumstances did not allow for centers to be implemented. The students did use this time as a time for implementing the

mini lessons taught during the week. The students became the facilitators of their writing as well as the editors and publishers. At different times during the intervention period, students were allowed the write alone and with partners. They were invited to share their writing with their classmates, assist in the editing process of their work and their partners work, and finally, publish their writing. Throughout the intervention period the teacher researcher observed, offered suggestions, pointed out inconsistencies in the writing, and encouraged the students' best writing.

Week 5 also brought the introduction of rhyming poetry. The objective of the poetry was to support the weekly phonics and spelling lessons. The poems written were to use words derived from the mystery words discovered during the Making Words lessons.

During the next 5 weeks of the intervention, the teacher researcher continued to present the aforementioned elements of the action plan. The activities were intended to reinforce the writing process and the students' recognition of the importance of the application of spelling skills in their writing. In the final 2 weeks of the intervention, the teacher researcher re-administered and completed the assessment tools used at the onset of the action plan.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Site A and Site C

The children were again given the First Grade Writing Survey at the end of the 12-week intervention to help the teacher researchers determine the children's attitudes and preferences about writing. The teacher researchers were looking to see if there was

an improvement in the children's attitude about writing after they had received specific phonics instruction, spelling and Making Words lessons. Results of the First Grade Writing Survey are detailed on the following page.

Table 3

Site A Responses to First Grade Writing Survey

	Great		Good		Not So Good		Terrible	
How do you feel when you write at home?	9/01 74%	11/01 75%	9/01 22%	11/01 17%	9/01 0%	11/01 4%	9/01 4%	11/01 4%
How do you feel when you write at school?	9/01 65%	11/01 74%	9/01 27%	11/01 13%	9/01 4%	11/01 0%	9/01 4%	11/01 13%
How do you feel when writing instead of playing?	9/01 35%	11/01 57%	9/01 13%	11/01 13%	9/01 17%	11/01 4%	9/01 35%	11/01 26%
How do you feel about writing with a friend?	9/01 70%	11/01 62%	9/01 17%	11/01 17%	9/01 9%	11/01 17%	9/01 4%	11/01 4%
How do you feel about writing on plain paper?	9/01 74%	11/01 70%	9/01 17%	11/01 13%	9/01 0%	11/01 4%	9/01 9%	11/01 13%
How do you feel about writing on colored paper?	9/01 57%	11/01 57%	9/01 17%	11/01 4%	9/01 4%	11/01 13%	9/01 22%	11/01 26%
How do you feel about writing on lined paper?	9/01 57%	11/01 75%	9/01 3%	11/01 17%	9/01 8%	11/01 4%	9/01 22%	11/01 4%
How do you feel when you have to stretch out a word so you can write it?	9/01 47%	11/01 65%	9/01 22%	11/01 2%	9/01 13%	11/01 4%	9/01 17%	11/01 9%

Table 3 shows that overall, the children were more confident in their writing, especially at school with a 9% increase in the children who felt great when writing at

school. An even greater increase came with an additional 18% of children who feel great about writing on lined paper and an additional 14% who feel good about it. With much of the phonetic training that the children received, the teacher researchers were anxious to see how the children reacted when asked to stretch out a word. They were rewarded when the results showed that an additional 18% of students felt great about stretching words out in order to spell them. A surprising result came when the data showed that an additional 22% of the children preferred writing over playing. This meant that more than two-thirds of the children at Site A would feel good or great about choosing writing over playing! One area that saw a decline was the amount of children who wanted to write with a friend. In September, 70% of the children preferred to write with a friend, while in November only 62% preferred to write with a friend. The teacher researchers believe this is due to an increased feeling of independence and confidence on the part of the children after being exposed to the various interventions over the 12-week period.

Table 4

Site C Response to First Grade Writing Survey

	Great		Good		Not So Good		Terrible	
How do you feel when you write at home?	9/01 42%	11/01 16%	9/01 42%	11/01 57%	9/01 8%	11/01 11%	9/01 8%	11/01 16%
How do you feel when you write at school?	9/01 42%	11/01 70%	9/01 42%	11/01 26%	9/01 8%	11/01 4%	9/01 8%	11/01 0%
How do you feel when writing instead of playing?	9/01 23%	11/01 11%	9/01 19%	11/01 16%	9/01 4%	11/01 16%	9/01 54%	11/01 57%
How do you feel about writing with a friend?	9/01 77%	11/01 59%	9/01 23%	11/01 30%	9/01 0%	11/01 7%	9/01 0%	11/01 4%
How do you feel about writing on plain paper?	9/01 46%	11/01 45%	9/01 23%	11/01 33%	9/01 12%	11/01 47%	9/01 19%	11/01 18%
How do you feel about writing on colored paper?	9/01 38%	11/01 64%	9/01 38%	11/01 18%	9/01 8%	11/01 7%	9/01 15%	11/01 11%
How do you feel about writing on lined paper?	9/01 38%	11/01 56%	9/01 15%	11/01 22%	9/01 19%	11/01 18%	9/01 27%	11/01 4%
How do you feel when you have to stretch out a word so you can write it?	9/01 23%	11/01 22%	9/01 31%	11/01 18%	9/01 15%	11/01 22%	9/01 31%	11/01 38%

Table 4 shows that the children at Site C also had an improved attitude about writing. The most pronounced area of improvement was in the children's attitude about

writing at school. Seventy percent of the students felt great about writing at school as compared to only 42% when the children were surveyed in September. As in Site A, there was a large increase of children who felt great about writing on colored paper. In September, only 38% of the students felt great about using colored paper, while at the end of the 12-weeks of intervention 64% of the children felt great about using paper of different colors. That was also reflected in the decline of students who felt terrible about colored paper. In September 38% of the students felt terrible about using colored paper, and at the end of the intervention only 4% felt terrible. As with Site A, there again were a large number of students who didn't feel as good about writing with a friend as they did in the first survey. Again, this is contributed to the increased confidence and independence of the students.

One area that brought surprise to the teacher researchers was in the question of how the children feel about writing at home. There was a 26% decrease in the amount of children who felt great about writing at home. The teacher researchers believe this can be attributed to the fact that many of the children at Site C are of above average intelligence. This is due to a tracking experiment undertaken by Site C school. A large number of the students were pressured at home to do additional writing, possibly without the positive support that is constantly in place at school.

Site A and Site C

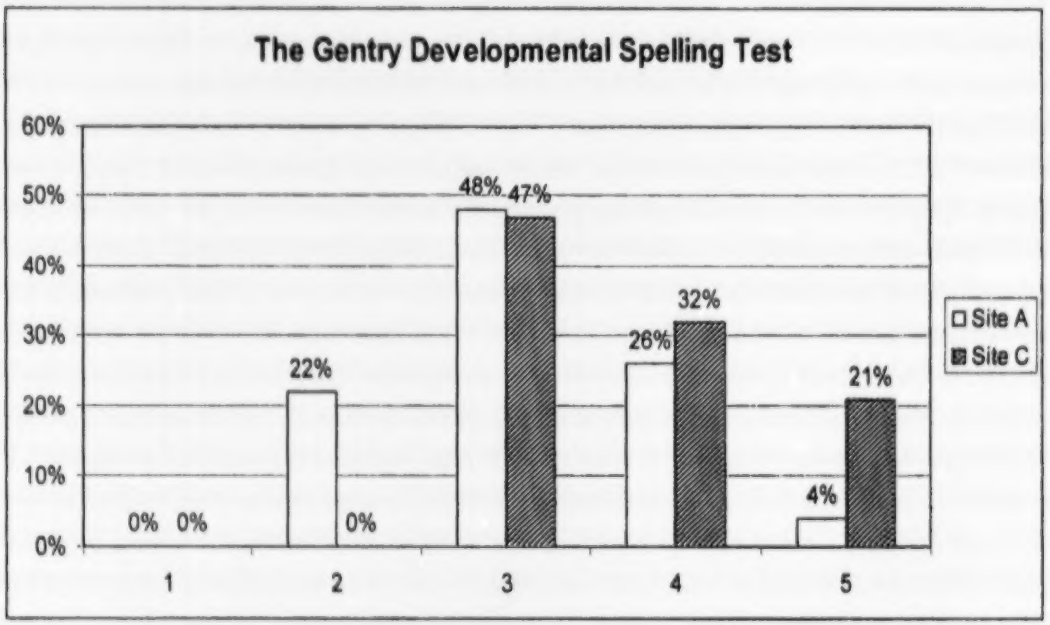

Figure 3. Site A and Site C Gentry Developmental Spelling Test, November 2001

Teacher researchers again administered the Gentry Developmental Spelling Test as they had in September. The test was given in the same fashion as it was in September. All of the children experienced an increase in their ability to spell phonetically. Of the students at Site A, 22% were at a semiphonetic spelling stage, 48% were at a phonetic stage, 26% were at a transitional stage and 4% were at a conventional stage. Of the students at Site C, 47% were at a phonetic stage, 32% were at a transitional stage and 21% were at a conventional stage. The assessment reflected that students at Site A were primarily at a phonetic stage, whereas the majority of the students at Site C were split between the transitional and conventional stages of spelling. All of the students in Site A and Site C were put into a developmental stage by using the highest percentage of words

spelled at a particular stage. For example, a student who spelled 60% of the words at a semiphonetic stage, 40% precommunicatively in September was rated as a semiphonetic writer. However if that same child scored 40% of the words semi-phonetically and 60% of the words phonetically, he or she was then moved into the tabulations of the phonetic spellers when results were analyzed for the November results. The implications of this are realized when children scored 60% precommunicatively in September and jumped to 90% precommunicative in November. This doesn't mean that the children didn't improve, for they did. It only means that they didn't achieve percentages that allowed them to move to the next developmental stage of spelling. Site A saw all the students move out of the precommunicative stage and into the semiphonetic or phonetic stage. Site C saw all the students move out of the semiphonetic stage and into the phonetic, transitional or conventional stage. The results are broadened across the spectrum of developmental categories, with most children showing a wider range of capabilities as spellers in November than they did in September.

Site B

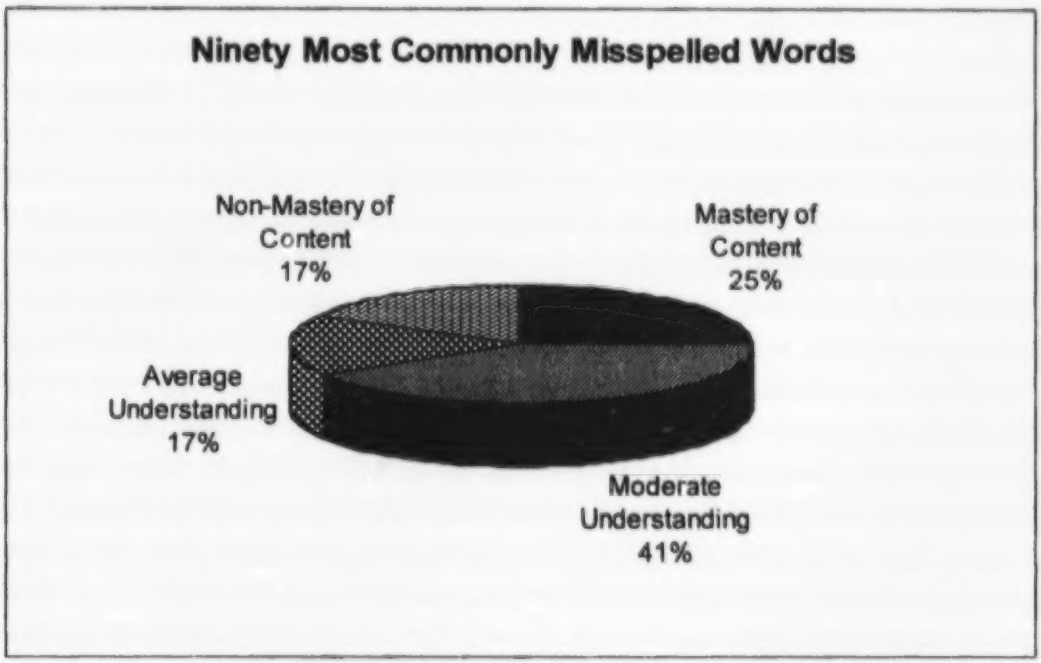

Figure 4. Site B most commonly misspelled words tested list, November 2001

During the course of the 12 week intervention, the teacher researcher introduced 10 pre-selected words from the Ninety Most Commonly Misspelled Words list. The students were given various clues to assist the students in the spelling of the words, as many of the words can not be spelled phonetically. These words were then added to the Word Wall for future reference when writing. Each time new words were added, the students were to either highlight the words in their spelling dictionary, or add them to the spelling dictionary if they were not there. The teacher researcher reiterated that there were 'no excuses' for spelling the words wrong since they were on the Word Wall. At the

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end of the intervention, the students at Site B were tested on their ability to spell the Ninety Most Commonly Misspelled Words. The test was administered in the same fashion as it was in September. Of the students at Site B, 25% had mastery of the content or 90-100% accuracy. This was a 12% increase from September. Forty-one percent had a moderate understanding or 80-89% accuracy. This was a 24% increase from September. Seventeen percent had an average understanding or 70-79% accuracy. This represented a 12% decrease from September's test. Seventeen percent did not master the content which is represented by less than 69% accuracy. This was a 24% decrease from September. When comparing individual students, all of the children experienced an ability to spell these words correctly as there was an increase in both mastery and moderate understanding of the content tested, and decreases were seen in average understanding and non-mastery of the content.

The students in Site B classroom again responded to the Writing Survey. The teacher researcher was looking to see if there was improvement in the students' attitude about writing after they had been given specific instruction in the writing process, phonics, spelling and Making Words lessons. In response to the question asking if the students believed they were writers, 100% of the students responded positively. This was an increase over September's responses.

Other questions on the Writing Survey related to learning how to write, why people write, what makes a good writer and how students feel about their writing. Many of the responses to the questions about how the students learned to write remained the same. Students responded again that they and others learn how to write at school and at

home from parents and other family members. A few students responded that some people learn to write from other writers. When asked what a writer does in order to write well, again the responses were similar to that of the September survey. According to the students at Site B, a good writer practices a lot, does research on what they write about, edits their work and has others check it over as well. All of these responses were direct results of learning the writing process. Throughout the intervention period students were directed again and again about the importance of practicing their writing in order to get better. Most of the students felt good about their writing. Their responses included that they can write when they feel sad and it makes them feel better, and they can write stories that others can enjoy. Only a few of the students did not feel good about their writing. They responded that they don't feel good right now, but with lots of practice, they can get better.

Sites A, B and C

In November of 2001 the teacher researchers again used the Written Language Inventory to evaluate the progress the students made after the interventions were administered. Across all three sites, the children showed a great improvement in their writing skills. At Site A, 4% were secure emergent, 70% were beginning early and 26% were secure early writers. At Site B, 5% were beginning fluent, 43% were secure early and 52% were secure fluent. At Site C, 100% of the children were secure early writers.

Conclusion

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, the results of all measured data reflect an increase in phonetic skills and improved writing abilities. The teacher researchers found that the skills the children were taught were internalized. This was shown through the children's use of the skills and strategies when attempting other projects. Teacher prompts were usually not necessary to assist the children with their writing and spelling. Due to the activities the children participated in with the word wall, the teacher researchers observed that the children correctly spelled the high frequency words the majority of the time because they used the word wall to assist their writing. The children's phonetic skills were also improved due to the Making Words lessons which were implemented each week.

After completing the research, the teacher researchers conclude that the concentration on phonemic awareness is essential to improving the writing skills of the students. There are many strategies and activities that can be used across all grade levels, which are fun and help to solidify phonetic concepts in the children's minds. Throughout the interventions, the teacher researchers discovered that many of the activities presented could be used across grade levels with minor modifications.

At Site C, there were factors that changed the typical results of a first grade classroom. In the fall, the teacher researcher was made aware of classroom make-up that would place many above average students in her classroom. This explains the vastly different range of results when comparing the two first grade sites. However, the

activities were easily modified to accommodate the different ability levels within the classroom.

Recommendations

The most important thing the teacher researchers gleaned from their research was consistency is the key to developing students phonetic and writing abilities. Consistency is recommended within each grade level by completing activities to support phonetic connections each day. However, consistency is also imperative across grade levels. Many of the activities completed at the first grade level could be modified to work with lower grade levels and higher grade levels. This was observed first hand by the teacher researcher at Site B, who was hesitant to use what was commonly accepted to be a primary activity. She found that so many of the activities could be transferred to the upper elementary levels, and the children would greatly benefit from these types of activities if the teacher is able to modify them in ways that meet the educational needs of children in higher grades.

As with any project, hindsight is 20/20. As the teacher researchers look back there are a few things they would change. This includes the use of the writer's workshop, which is a very involved learning center. None of the teacher researchers realized the planning and maintenance required to support this type of learning center. Given the opportunity to change this part of the intervention, the teacher researchers determined they would use individual writing projects rather than a workshop for the children to practice their writing skills.

The final challenge of the project came with the writing surveys that were used to determine the children's feeling about writing. From the knowledge gained from other courses, it is now realized that it is easier for the children to decide their feelings when offered just two choices – good or bad.

Overall, the teacher researchers believe they provided strong evidence to support the need for direct phonics instruction in every school at every grade level. The strongest message that the teacher researchers would like to be carried away from this research is the realization that phonics, directly and systematically presented to children of all ages, is a necessary element in the development of good readers and writers.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A1

Name _____ **Date** _____

First Grade Writing Survey

1. **How do you feel when you write at home?**

2. **How do you fell when you write at school?**

3. **How do you feel about writing instead of playing?**

4. **How do you feel about writing with a friend?**

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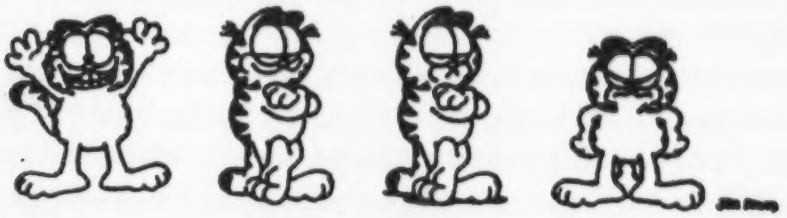
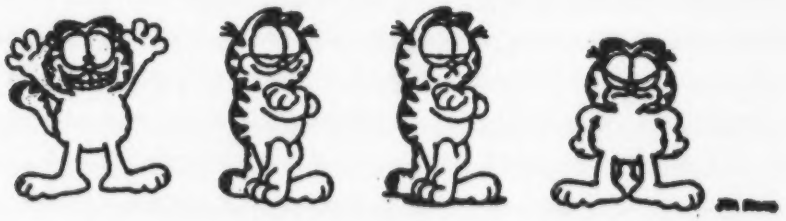
5. **How do you feel about writing on plain paper?**

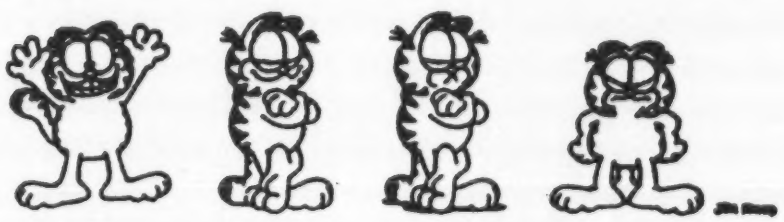


6. **How do you feel about writing on colored paper?**



7. **How do you feel about writing on lined paper?**

8. **How do you feel when you have to stretch out a word so you can write it?**



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Appendix A2

From: "Kim Campbell" <kim@pawsinc.com>
To: "Sandy Bailey" <teachkids4@msn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2002 9:38 AM
Subject: RE: Seeking consent to reproduce Garfield

Sandy, you have Paws, Inc.'s permission to use the character as described.

You may need permission from the authors of the Survey, too.

Good luck with your project.

Kim Campbell

-----Original Message-----
From: Sandy Bailey [mailto:teachkids4@msn.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 02, 2002 7:08 PM
To: Kim Campbell
Subject: Seeking consent to reproduce Garfield character

Dear Ms. Campbell,

I am currently a student at St. Xavier University in Chicago and am enrolled in their Field Based Master's Program. I am writing to ask you for permission to reproduce the Garfield character which is part of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey found in the Second Edition of Improving Reading - A Handbook of Strategies. This book was written by Jerry L. Johns and Susan Davis Lenski and published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company in 1997. We would like to use portions of this survey including the Garfield character as a reading survey for first grade students. The results of this survey will be published as part of our thesis. The reading survey with Garfield will be part of the Appendix.

Please let me know if there is any further information you need. I would be happy to fax you anything you need.

Sincerely,

Sandra Bailey

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Appendix B

Name _____ Date _____

DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING TEST

1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____

Appendix C

Ninety Commonly Misspelled Words for Upper-Grade Word Walls

about	except	probably	very
again	excited	really	want
almost	favorite	right	was
also	first	said	wear
always	friends	school	weather
another	have	something	we're
anyone	hole	sometimes	went
are	I'm	terrible	were
beautiful	into	that's	what
because	it's	their	when
before	its	then	where
buy	knew	there	whether
by	know	they're	whole
can't	laugh	thought	with
could	let's	threw	won
didn't	myself	through	won't
don't	new	to	wouldn't
enough	no	too	write
especially	off	trouble	your
everybody	one	two	you're
everyone	our	until	
everything	people	usually	

Appendix D

Name _____ Date _____

Writing Survey

1.) Are you a writer? _____

_____

_____

2.) How did you learn to write? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3.) How do people learn to write? _____

_____

_____

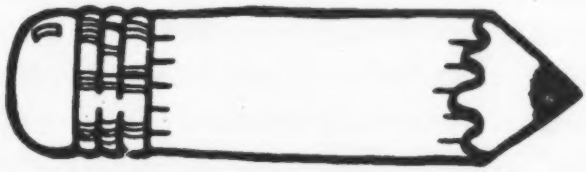
_____

_____

4.) Why do people write? _____

5.) What do you think a good writer does in order to write well?

6.) How do you feel about your writing? _____



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Organization/Address: Saint Xavier University 3700 W. 103rd St. Chgo, IL	Telephone: 708-802-6219	FAX: 708-802-6208
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